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SUBJECT: SUNNI LEADERS FEAR STREET REACTION TO ELECTION

REVIEW REPORT

Classified By: Ambassador Zalmay Khalilzad for reasons 1.4 (B) and (D)

**¶11. (C) SUMMARY:** Ambassador met on January 15 with key leaders from the Iraqi National Dialogue Council (INDC). Sheykh Khalaf Al-Ayan said that Tawaffuq Front was under pressure from the "street" to abandon the political process if the International Mission for Iraqi Elections (IMIE) assessment does not award the Sunnis more seats in the Council of Representatives. (NOTE: The IMIE report does not make recommendations concerning seat allocation. END NOTE.) INDC leaders raised security and safety issues, focusing on Sunni participation in the Iraqi Government and on ensuring that the Ministry of Interior (MOI) and Ministry of Defense (MOD) stay out of sectarian hands. The INDC leaders claimed that their constituency is under siege - from the terrorists, the government, and the Coalition - and unless they can address these concerns quickly, the anger from the "street" could grow. Negotiations about a government coalition, they stated, are small advances as the Sunnis grapple with whether to seek a non-Shia alliance with the Kurds or to try to woo moderate Shia into an Arab alliance. The leaders agreed with the Ambassador that terror and Iran are the two immediate problems in Iraq, adding that they are urging the insurgency to stop attacking the Coalition. END SUMMARY.

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Street Demands: Abandon the Political Process  
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**¶12. (C)** Ambassador met on January 15 with Iraqi National Dialogue Council (INDC) chairman Sheykh Khalif Al-Ayan, who was accompanied by Mahmood Mashadani and Abdel Nasser Al-Janabi. The group had requested the meeting to discuss "urgent issues." Sheykh Khalaf told Ambassador that the Sunni street is demanding that the Tawaffuq coalition, of which INDC is a key party, withdraw from the political process if the IMIE does not award the Sunni Arabs more seats in its assessment report. Ambassador cautioned Sheykh Khalaf not to fall into SCIRI leader Abdel Azziz Hakim's trap. Hakim wants the Sunni Arabs to respond negatively to the report to paint them as unreasonable extremists, Ambassador said. (NOTE: The report, released January 19, does not make recommendations on seat allocations. END NOTE.) Rather than arguing about a few seats that will not affect the balance of power, Ambassador added, it is better to focus on influencing the makeup of the next government.

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New Government - Physical Security is Key  
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**¶13. (C)** The Sunni leaders complained bitterly about increased government repression against them following the election. Sheykh Khalaf claimed that 750 Sunnis were detained on the pretext of the investigation into the kidnapping of MinInterior Bayan Jabr's sister (NOTE: She was released on

January 18. END NOTE.) PolCouns responded that the MOI denied any involvement and the MOD asked for the names so they could look into it. (NOTE: Sunni leaders had earlier claimed that 58 Sunni election observers were detained and 38 of them were later found dead, but have not provided any names to back up the charge. Without evidence, these claims are difficult to verify, but violence, including assassinations, against the Sunnis involved in the political process is a fact. END NOTE.)

¶4. (C) The Sunni leaders said they must have a Minister of Interior whom they can trust, and they want assurances that the Shia will not interfere with the selection. Abdel Nasser al-Janabi said that if the Sunnis can name the Minister of Interior and Defense, the Shia can choose the Prime Minister. For the PM, they would prefer Fadhila's Nadim al-Jabiri over VP Adil Abd al-Mahdi (who they said is too close to Iran) or PM Ibrahim Jafari. Given a choice between Jafari and Mahdi, Mashadani said he prefers Mahdi, although Allawi also is acceptable.

¶5. (C) Uncertain if it will be possible to form a coalition with Kurds and moderates to counter the Shia alliance, Mashadani said the ideal coalition would have the Sunnis ally with the Shia Fadhila instead of Allawi. (NOTE: To have influence, a coalition needs at least 1/3 (or 92) of the Council of Representatives votes -- the margin needed to block a Presidential nomination or changes to the constitution. (END NOTE.) If Sadr and Fadhila break from the Shia Alliance, Mashadani said, an Arab governing coalition is possible.

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Bitter Plight of Arab Sunnis in Iraq

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¶6. (C) The Sunni leaders highlighted the difficult circumstances of their electorate. The Sunnis are besieged from all sides, they said, threatened by the terrorists and attacked by the government, the Badr Corps, and the Coalition. Khalaf claimed that MOD units are occupying homes and displacing families in Anbar as well as uprooting palm trees that are key to their subsistence. U.S. snipers are killing people even when they cross the street with white flags, he added, and corpses of murdered Sunnis are found every day. Most of the detainees in Coalition and IG hands (over 16,000) are Sunnis. Some, according to the Sunnis, are held in secret MOI prisons where they are tortured and killed. Sheykh Khalaf appealed to the Ambassador to look into the "Eagles Square" Green Zone prison, where he said 68 Sunnis are being held by the major crimes unit, some for extended periods, in desperate conditions. More must be done to release detained Sunnis who are innocent, Khalaf said. Ambassador said that inflammatory statements by SCIRI leader Abd al-Aziz Hakim, equating all Sunnis with the insurgency, escalate the situation and give the militias an excuse to attack them. Other media, he noted, including al-Hurrah, are playing a negative role and escalating the sectarian rhetoric. Ambassador urged the Sunni leaders to avoid Hakim's provocations and to put themselves on a higher political level, stating their political goals and the desire for a national unity government in a non-confrontational, deliberate manner.

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Two Scourges - Terror and Iran

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¶7. (C) Ambassador told the Sunni leaders that Iraq faces two scourges, terror and the negative influence of Iran. Abd Nasir opined that we have identical goals, just different methods. Ambassador called upon the leaders to use their influence, so aptly demonstrated in the pre-election period, to call for an end of violence against the now fully

legitimate GOI. Sheykh Khalaf said the Sunnis agree that the resistance should stop attacking the Coalition and should focus on the Iranian threat.

¶ 8. (C) COMMENT: Despite the many challenges and obstacles ahead, the Sunni Arab political leaders clearly want to be players in the formation of the new government and likely will not withdraw from the political process. Ambassador pledged to help provide for their security by helping with weapons permits and safety equipment. It was telling that in the long conversation focusing on Sunni Arab priorities for the next government, none of the leaders mentioned the need to change the constitution. Mashadani told Poloff after the meeting that security issues are now the focal points of Sunni Arab concerns. END COMMENT.

KHALILZAD